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AUTHOR Nadler, Marjorie Keeshan
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ABSTRACT

With the increased interest in public relations education, it is important for educators to be aware of options available for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching in this area. A number of nonprint learning resources are available, including internships, in-class campaigns, and national competitions. Public relations internships are essentially one-on-one teaching situations that offer real-world work experience while allowing students to integrate theoretical material with the development of practical skills. Many campuses or communication departments already have internship programs that could be expanded to include public relations. An alternate resource is an in-class public relations campaign, which can also help prepare students for their internships. This would involve dividing the class into public relations "firms," which would then compete to provide the best campaign for the designated client. The national competitions are an additional way to offer students practical public relations experience. Dependent upon each contest's regulations, it is possible to use the national competition as the in-class campaign assignment. Such competitions include the Philip Morris Marketing/Communications Competition, the Levi-Strauss Public Relations Challenge, and the Bateman Case Competition. (HTH)

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LEARNING RESOURCES FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

by

Marjorie Keeshan Nadler
Department of Communication
Miami University
Oxford, OH 45056
(513) 529-4722

A paper presented to the Non-Print Learning Resources Group at the Central States Speech Association Convention, April, 1986.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines three areas of non-print learning resources available to those teaching public relations: internships, in class campaigns, and national competitions. Since good internship program guides are available elsewhere, the internship section focuses upon opportunities available. The section on class campaigns outlines options for classroom campaign assignments and includes a sample assignment handout. The final section describes opportunities for student involvement in national competitions. All of the areas are presented along with development of the philosophy that integration of theoretical material with pragmatic skill development is the best way to approach teaching of public relations. The best prepared students will have complete development of both the theoretical and applied sides of the field.

Learning Resources for Public Relations

Public relations is a relatively new area for many speech communication departments. It has gradually appeared as a curriculum option in many speech communication departments ranging from a single course to a well-developed major program. With this increase in course offerings, student interest has grown. Public relations courses and programs are rapidly becoming popular areas of study. With all this increased interest in the area, it is important for educators to be aware of options available for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching in this area. There are a number of non-print learning resources available, and this paper will discuss three areas: internships, in class campaigns, and the national competitions.

Internships

Public relations internships are one of the best ways for students to gain experience while still in college. Students need some sort of experience to allow them to compete in a job market as competitive as public relations, and internship experience gives them an advantage over students with only traditional academic backgrounds.

There are many excellent guides available for those interested in establishing an internship program on a college campus. (1) Many universities and/or communication departments already have internship programs established. The expansion of such internship programs to include public relations opportunities would require the availability of locations for placement of public relations interns and the availability of faculty supervisors for the internships.

While the availability of faculty supervisors is a question best addressed by each department, there are at least a few public relations internship opportunities available in every area of the country--including colleges located in small towns. Often there are many on campus opportunities including the university public relations offices, (such as the news bureau, alumni relations, fundraising, etc.), various college or department offices, and even student organizations. While these internships may not have the glamour of a top-notch public relations firm, they do provide students with solid experience and portfolio items. These are internships students can engage in as a part of their regular academic course load. For students willing to leave campus during the regular school term or enroll in internships during the summer there are a multitude of opportunities. Even mid-sized cities generally have public relations firms, hospitals with public relations departments, businesses with public relations departments, and non-profit agencies eager for any assistance they can get. Many of the larger public relations firms or business have well established internship programs that are open for competition from students across the country. Ruder Finn and Rotman in Chicago is an example of a public relations firm in this category (2), and Bank of America in San Francisco is an example of a national business with a public relations internship open to national competition. (3)

Internships offer many advantages to students since they are essentially one-on-one teaching situations, offer real world work experience, and at the same time allow students to integrate theoretical material with the development of practical skills. Unfortunately, internships are not always available to all students

interested in public relations. Some internship programs are limited in size by availability of faculty supervisors and/or internship locations. Also, some universities choose to limit their internship programs to their best students. Regardless of the reason for the limitation of these opportunities, those students unable to participate in an internship program need alternative options for the kinds of hands-on experience which enhances the learning of necessary material in public relations.

In Class Campaigns

An alternate resource available to every student that takes a public relations class is an in class public relations campaign. This option is one that still allows students to engage in valuable experiences that help to clarify and assimilate class materials as well as offer some kind of experience that can be helpful in their job search. Often these kinds of in class experiences also help better prepare students for their internships.

While there are a variety of ways an in class campaign can be carried out, and I will discuss the kinds of projects I employ in my public relations classes. The class is divided into "public relations firms" consisting of 5-6 students each. Each group is directed to organize themselves into a "public relations firm." The organization process allows students to understand the organization of actual public relations firms and departments as well as requires each group to have a coherent structure for the development of their campaign.

The next step involves the selection of clients, and there are a number of options for this process. One calls for the instructor to select a single client for the class. Each group would be competing to provide the best campaign for that client. The client may be a

real one such as a local business, a non-profit organization, an on-campus student organization, etc. When using an actual local client, it is helpful to have the client in class for at least one class period to allow the students to discuss the client's organization, its goals, any problems, and to gather any information they may deem necessary. It is also a good idea to insist that any questions that arise during the course of the campaign planning be funnelled through the instructor to prevent excessive client contacts by the students. With this option, the client is invited back to class to hear the presentations of each student "firm" and may have a say in the grading process by selecting the best campaign and providing feedback to each group.

Selection of a client this way has a number of advantages and drawbacks. It does require students to deal with actual problems, opportunities, and constraints. It sets up a competitive atmosphere which may increase the motivation of students, but some instructors may not be comfortable with this approach. It does, however, require the selection of a client that is willing to spend a considerable amount of time in class. Not only must the client be willing to be in class to answer questions and help provide the initial information necessary to start the campaign planning, but the client must be willing to be in several class sessions to hear each presentation and comment on it. That entails a time committment from a client to be in class 5-6 days at least. Clients willing to do this are available, but they are likely to be a limited supply--particularly in small towns. The ability to carry out a project like this several semesters in a row is limited by the availability of a number of clients willing to devote their time to it.

Another option for the selection of a client is to allow each group to choose their own client. The chosen client should be a real organization. Students who are allowed to create ficticious clients often create very unrealistic situations to go along with them, and some of the valuable learning process is lost. The selected client may be a real organization locally where students must deal directly with their client, or a real organization nationally where client contact is minimized or non-existant. Local organizations offer the advantage of requiring campaigns to be designed with the intent of pleasing a real client, and feedback from the client is possible. National organizations allow students to create campaigns without the additional time and other constraints involved in dealing with a client directly.

I use both forms of these clients in my classes. In the introductory public relations class, I have students work for an actual national client that they rarely deal with directly. In the advanced public relations class, they deal with an actual local client, and that client's feedback is part of the basis for their grade. The introductory public relations class has less time to work on their group project since they need to have the basic theory and what goes into a campaign taught to them before they can begin work on a campaign. I also have seen a greater variation in quality of work from the introductory classes, and the reputation of a program can be hurt by having a local organization unhappy with student work. Additionally, students are trying to assimilate so much material in the introductory classes, that a less challenging project is called for. The advanced class, on the other hand, has the whole semester to work on their project since they are already familiar with the basic

theory and how to put a campaign together. The quality of the projects is higher, and I run through less clients locally by assigning this as a project only in the advanced class. A small town can run out of clients very quickly if a large number of groups are looking for clients every semester.

Once a client has been chosen and the level of client's involvment is decided upon, a decision has to be made about whether students should carry out the campaign or not. I do not have the introductory public relations classes carry out any of their campaign. Since they can't start the campaign until half way through the class, they don't have time to design and carry out a campaign. Also, selection of a non-local client means that they don't have anyone to carry out the campaign for. I have my advanced public relations classes carry out as much as possible of their campaign, but often the time frame they are requested to design the campaign for exceeds the class time. Since that varies from client to client, I instruct them to carry out the campaign as much as possible. Carrying out the campaign has some terrific advantages from learning and experience perspectives, but it involves additional time demands on students. It also requires clients cooperative enough to want campaigns carried out within the time frames of each class semester or quarter.

The assignment for the campaign is important for directing students without stifling their own initiative and creativity. The basic guidelines I use can be employed for student groups working with any of the client options discussed above. The first requirement for each group is to organize themselves into a public relations firm. They should be required to select a name for their firm and to assign each member duties. Each group should be required to keep log sheets

of the time they spend to assist them in the budgeting for their project. Once the firm is set up, each group should be allowed to select a client (with approval from the instructor) or be introduced to the client selected by the instructor. It is important to make sure that they select clients that are feasible to work with. National clients that are difficult to research would be a problem.

The next step is the research phase. Each group should select a problem or opportunity to focus on. It is important that the focus of the campaign be narrow enough to allow students to do a complete and realistic job in the time frame available to them. For example, some students may select a national client and design a local campaign for them. One student group chose to use Apple computers as their client, and they designed a program to encourage students at their university to use Apple computers. They created the program as a model that could also be employed at other universities. This allowed the campaign to be realistic in meeting local demands, and they were able to be very specific about media outlets and other local requirements. Once a problem is selected, students should establish goals and objectives and select their target publics. They should carry out library research and/or survey research so that they have ample information on which to base their campaign.

Once their research is completed, each group should begin planning the campaign itself. They should be encouraged to go through an analysis procedure generating a variety of options to reach their goal and evaluating the costs, benefits and outcomes of each option. In their final report, each group should have to justify their selection of options. After the overall strategy is developed, students should then begin to prepare their proposal. The proposal

generated should include the major information learned from their research phase that led them to select the activities they did, a timetable of activities, a budget, manpower requirements, and samples of all materials that would be required to carry out the proposal (news releases, feature stories, posters, direct mail pieces, brochures, etc.). Their proposal should be as complete as possible in accounting for all details that would be required to carry out each activity as well as media lists for each media source that would be involved. The proposal should outline the enactment stage of the campaign whether it is carried out or not, and it should also outline how the proposed activities would be evaluated if they were carried out.

Students should present their project both orally and in writing. They should write up their project as a proposal they would use to persuade a client to go ahead with the project. This encourages development of organizational and writing skills. They should also be given an opportunity to present the project orally in class. If a local client is employed, that client ought to be at the presentation. The oral presentation helps develop delivery skills and allows the rest of the class to learn from each other's project. It also allows the rest of the class to comment on the project and critique it.

Grading these projects can be difficult. I have found that just about every group gets involved in the project and spends a great deal of time on it. Generally the results are quite positive. Grading should focus on how well the project meets the assignment, the creativity involved, the quality of the ideas, and the quality of the writing. The organization and presentation of both the written and oral project should also be considered in the grade, since those are

aspects that would be important if this was a real project. An important criteria is also how well the planned activities would be likely to meet the goals and objectives set at the outset. I have included a copy of the assignment I give to the introductory public relations class along with the information I provide them about the grading process.

These projects are somewhat limited in value as compared to an internship, because they generally aren't carried out. However, students do gain valuable experience in the planning of a campaign, and that experience is valuable both in terms of what students learn from it and as an aid in their job searches. I have found that students are better able to assimilate the theoretical material from the course after completing this kind of project. The details involved in planning a campaign of this nature require students to draw on a great deal of the material from the course. In order to do a good job, students must not only know the material academically, but they must be able to apply it and work with it. Students are often more motivated to learn material when they know it will have a direct application in their projects. Additionally, students have portfolio samples to show prospective employers the kinds of work they are capable of doing. A number of students have reported that employers were impressed enough with their projects to count them as experience when considering job placements. Overall, these kinds of projects offer students valuable learning opportunities that supplement their other classroom experiences well.

National Competitions

One additional way to offer students experience in the public relations field is to allow them to enter national public relations

competitions. Depending upon each contest's regulations, it is possible to use the national competition as the in class campaign assignment. One such competition that works well with in class projects is the Philip Morris Marketing/Communications Competition (4). This is an annual competition that is open to student groups from any university in marketing and/or public relations. Phillip Morris sends out an information package about the various companies in the Phillip Morris group and allows students to select any non-tobacco company or product to work with. Students design either a marketing or public relations campaign for that company or product according to some very loose guidelines from Phillip Morris. Prizes are awarded to the top three projects in an undergraduate division and the top three in a graduate division. Last year, over 120 student teams from universities across the country competed. The Philip Morris guidelines fit well into the in class project guidelines, and the due date for the competition is in January. That time frame works out well for fall semester classes. It is also possible for student groups to work outside classes on this project, and the experience they gain in planning a campaign is invaluable.

The Phillip Morris competition is one where students simply plan a campaign without carrying it out. Other competitions offer students practice in planning and carrying out the projects they design. One very good example of this is a competition open to Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapters with student agencies (5). The Levi-Strauss Public Relations Challenge was started last year, and it calls for students to plan, carry out, and evaluate a public relations program. This was a very challenging competition since students were allowed only two weeks to plan their campaign and six

weeks to carry it out, evaluate it, and write it up. Each student agency was given a $300 budget to work with. The competition is being repeated this year with longer time frames and larger budgets. Prizes were awarded to the top three projects, with honerable mentions going to six other universities. The Multiple Sclerosis Foundation is starting a similar competition this year for PRSSA chapters; however, it does not require students to actually carry out the campaign.

A slightly different competition is also open to PRSSA chapters. The Bateman Case Competition is an annual problem solving competition sponsored by PRSSA. Each year student chapters are presented with a public relations problem they need to solve. They prepare a videotape and a written solution to the problems, and the videotapes and papers are evaluated by professionals in the field. This competition awards prizes in each district, and the district winners advance to national competition. Student chapters are not expected to carry out the solutions they come up with.

All of these competitions offer students valuable additional experience in the area of public relations. The notion of competing with student groups from universities all over the country tends to motivate students to work hard, and the various competitions offer students the opportunity to work on realistic situations and problems. The competitions offering students a chance to actually carry out their ideas are especially valuable experiences. These competitions also result in a variety of excellent portfolio items that assist students in their job searches. These competitions do, however, require extensive time from the faculty supervisor. Unless the competition is part of a regular class assignment (and the PRSSA ones really cannot be), then the faculty advisor sponsoring the student

groups would be expected to offer assistance and guidance in addition to their other classroom and research duties. Also, competitions such as the Levi-Strauss, Multiple Sclerosis and Bateman Case Competition are ones that require a PRSSA chapter to exist before students can engage in them. PRSSA activities offer their own benefits in supplementing the educational process as well, but some programs may not have a PRSSA chapter or qualify for one.

Conclusion

Public relations is an area of study that requires the acquisition of knowledge and theoretical material as well as the development of important skills. Students wishing to be competitive in the job market need to be able to demonstrate mastery of the theoretical side of the field as well as the practical applications of that theory. The kinds of supplemental resources discussed in this paper are approaches that enhance the learning of theory and practice in public relations and approaches that allow students to be able to demonstrate their ability to integrate their understanding of both aspects of public relations. Internships, in class campaigns and national competitions are all options that can be employed individually or in combinations to enhance the effectiveness of teaching public relations.

ENDNOTES

(1) One very good guideline for developing an internship program can be found in: Hanson, Jarice, "Internships and the Individual: Suggestions for Implementing (or Improving) an Internship Program," Communication Education, 33 (1), 1984, 53-61.

(2) For information on the Ruder Finn and Rotman internship write to: Intern Program, Ruder Finn and Rotman, Inc., 444 N. Michigan Avenue, 16th Floor, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

(3) For information about the Bank of America in San Francisco's internship program write to: Phomia Sliman, Associate Public Relations Officer, Bank of America, Marketing Public Relations #3120, P.O. Box 37000, San Francisco, CA 94137.

(4) For information about the Philip Morris Marketing/Communications Competition write to: Cynthia Hawkins, Competition Coordinator, Philip Morris, Inc., 120 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

(5) For information about PRSSA and the PRSSA competitions write to: Dr. Chris Teahan, PRSA National Headquarters, 845 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

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Group Project

You have learned enough about PR to be able to generate a proposal for a PR campaign. You will have several national "clients" to use as a basis for your campaign, and these will be discussed in class. Your group project involves three stages:

I. Organization

Your group needs to organize itself into a PR firm. Your firm requires a name, a logo, and roles for each group member. Minimally, there must be a person assigned responsibility for maintaining group records and a person assigned to be your group's liaison with me. The group liaison (if not the whole group) is expected to meet with me at least once every two weeks to discuss your group's progress.

After your group has organized itself and selected your "client," you need to meet with me to discuss the next stages.

II. Research

While the specifics involved will vary according to the unique nature of each project, some general areas should be included:

A. Identification of the problem
B. Establishment of goals and objectives
C. Selection of publics
D. Informal research
E. Plans for formal research (Note: both forms of research must be included in the plans for your project. The formal research should include a completed questionnaire and study design.)

Your group is responsible for carrying out sufficient parts of this phase to to allow you to propose the rest of the stages. That includes carrying out A-D and complete plans for E. You are not required to carry out the formal research although some groups may choose to do so.

III. Planning

Your group should plan a tentative PR campaign based upon what you expect to result from your research phase. Your planning should include:

A. Strategy analysis of alternative approaches available to deal with the PR problem.
B. Selection of a specific approach and tactics
C. The methods of communication to be employed
D. A timetable of activities and events
E. A cost estimate for each part of the proposed plan (including the research phase).
F. Plans for the proposed evaluation phase of the project.

Each group will present their project orally to the class and submit a written proposal to me. Your presentation will include a summary of the proposed campaign you are suggesting for your client. Each group will have 20-25 minutes to present this project and 10 minutes for questions and critique from the class. Please watch your time closely or we will not have time for 2 presentations a day. Your written report and group evaluations are due no later than the time of your presentation in class.

Please keep in mind that you have limited time to carry out this project. Your group will need to plan and budget your time very carefully. Each group is strongly encouraged to consult with me on a regular basis.

A project worthy of a C will meet the minimum requirements of this assignment in a reasonably professional and straightforward manner. A project worthy of a B will meet the minimum requirements of this assignment, be clearly organized, have a professional presentation, and demonstrate some creativity. A project worthy of an A will go beyond the minimum requirements, will be clearly organized, will have sections interrelated clearly, will have a professional presentation, and will demonstrate creativity in carrying out the project. I will be glad to provide feedback to your group at all stages of your progress.

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